An
Inaugural Essay

on Paſsd March 1829

Hydrocephalus;

Submitted to the Medical Faculty
of the
University of Pennsylvania,
for the Degree of
Doctor of Medicine;

by
Henry Pettit,
of
Pennsylvania.

March. 1829.

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Hydrocephalus, vel Hydrencephalus.

This term, derived from the Greek words ὑδωρ water, and κεφαλη, the head, signifies a Dropsy of the Brain. It is a disease, which varies greatly both in its course and termination.

It was not until the appearance of, Dr Whytt's treatise on the subject, about sixty years ago, that it was considered as a separate disease. Formerly, it was divided into Externus and Internus; it was denominated Externus, when the water had collected between the membranes of the Brain, but when the fluid was contained in the ventricles, it was called Internus. But these appellations seem to have been in a great measure forsaken.

The division of the disease, is now generally, into Acute and Chronic. It is the former, or the acute species, of which I intend more particularly to speak. It assumes various forms, and hence there is frequently great difficulty in distinguishing the different sympt

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symptoms which are regarded as peculiar to it. Children are more particularly exposed to its attacks, and although adults are by no means entirely free from it, yet it seldom makes its appearance after the age of puberty. Latterly, however it has been supposed, that individuals in advanced life, are more subject to its attacks than had formerly been imagined.

It is a disease peculiar to all seasons of the year, though some are of opinion that its attacks are more frequent in the summer.

Those children who are of a scrophulous habit and have the peculiarities of appearance incident to that disease, are supposed to be particularly liable to Hydrocephalus.

Particular families are exposed to it, as there are instances on record, where several children of the same parents have suffered from it. Instances have been known where it has been converted into a scrophulous disease.

Dr. Cheyne gives it as his opinion, that when it is a family complaint, cures are more easily effected.

The proximate cause of the disease has been the origin of many

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many controversies, and there is still considerable doubt on the subject. This, with other circumstances, tends to make the disease to those not well acquainted with its peculiar symptoms one, of great embaraſsment.

It was the opinion of the late Dr. Rush, that it ought to be considered as the effect of a primary inflammation, or accumulation of blood in the Brain. He says that "the first stage of the disease is the effect of, causes, which produce a less degree of that inflammation which constitutes Phrenitis," and "that the second stage is a less degree of that effusion which constitutes serous apoplexy in Adults." Other opinions have also been assigned, one of which is, that it is peculiar to inflammation, and it has also been supposed, that, in a majority of cases, congestion and a slight degree of inflammation precede the accumulation of water.

Dr. Whytt supposed every kind of Dropsy to be produced by the same cause, viz; such a state of the parts as makes the exhalents throw out a greater quantity of fluid than the absorbents can take up. Dr. Darwin is said to have adopted the opinion, that Hydrocephalus is caused by ructerty

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inactivity of the vessels of the Brain, but he also expressed his opinion that the torpor of the absorbent vessels is often a secondary consequence.

Many cases of the disease are accompanied with an inflammatory action of the vessels of the Brain, and other instances happen at the same time with Anasarca.

It is now supposed that Dropsy is the consequence of an alteration of the condition of the vessels of the part in which the disease appears, in either the cellular or the serous tissues, and that Inflammation usually accompanies this altered state, and that the remote causes tend to produce the same effect.

The Causes are such as act immediately on the Brain or, in an indirect manner, on the organs of Digestion. Disorganization of the Brain, schirrous affections, ossifications tumours, may be mentioned as tending to produce it, as also, costiveness, irritation from worms &c.

Hydrocephalus may be confounded with several of the varieties of fever, but by paying particular attention to the symptoms of each disease, it is not, generally, a difficult task

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been asserted, that cures have been effected by their use.

The senses, and the mental faculties, remain generally, in a great measure, unimpaired.

An operation for the cure of this affection has been performed, which consists of puncturing the cranium, and evacuating at intervals, a small quantity of the fluid. This is said to have been successful in some instances, but great judgment is requisite as to the particular cases, in which it should be recommended.

Careful and particular attention should be paid to the disease on the first appearance of its symptoms, as great difficulty is sometimes experienced in ascertaining its real nature, and after all due care and watchfulness, the termination will frequently be fatal.

A disease therefore, which is so frequently the cause of domestic affliction, should be entitled to our particular concern, and untiring attention, as the gratification experienced by all concerned in the restoration of the patients' health, more than compensates for the many anxious hours, spent in

watching the progreſs of the malady. .

G. H.

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